



JF(7)
38

The New Administration

An Address Delivered Before the
Women's Democratic Association of Minnesota,
May 5, 1921

By
DAVID HUNTER MILLER



JF1357(73)

United States -
Politics in
government

THE NEW ADMINISTRATION.

An Address Delivered Before the Women's Democratic
Association of Minnesota, May 5, 1921

BY DAVID HUNTER MILLER.

It is not easy for me to express the pleasure which I feel in speaking to this assemblage; for that pleasure comes not only from the satisfaction which one must always have in addressing an audience of brilliance and distinction, but from that deeper feeling of being among friends and sympathizers, rather than with critics and Republicans, of being among those whom I know in advance will greet at least with kindly interest, the utterances of a fellow Democrat.

My topic is the new administration; and I suppose some one will ask how is it possible to pass judgment on an administration which has been in office only two months and will say that that is too short a period in which to prove success; well, I answer, I am not going to pass any judgment, all I am intending to do is to make a few comments; the country will have an opportunity to pass judgment later; and so far as the period of two months is concerned, I admit that such a period is not long enough to prove success; but I also recall that two months has often been found sufficient to demonstrate that success is not deserved.

The difference between Democratic and Republican policies is only in part in things done or attempted; it is a common saying that in many matters a Republican administration does just what a Democratic administration would do, and vice versa; now there is more or less truth in that idea; but there is a vital, a fundamental difference that sometimes escapes us, and that difference is found in the attitude

of mind, the point of view, the inspiration or motive for doing things.

Now I call this a vital difference because it is the most important distinction to be taken in all things human. The man who is honest because he thinks it right is as far apart as the poles asunder from the man who is honest merely because he thinks it wise.

Look at the attitude of the two parties in foreign affairs. The attitude of the Republican party in foreign affairs is based on politics and that of the Democratic party on statesmanship. Now I do not make that statement as a mere assertion, for I expect to prove it.

Take the case of the Colombian treaty, negotiated in 1914 by a Democratic administration; it provided for the payment to Colombia of twenty-five million dollars on account of the separation of Panama from Colombia in 1903, resulting in the building of the Panama Canal; the United States policy behind that treaty was that for the sake of fairness and of our relations with Latin-America in general and with Colombia in particular, that payment should be made and accordingly that arguments as to the technical correctness or not of the acts of President Roosevelt's administration were immaterial.

When that treaty was submitted to the Senate, it was assailed with abuse and invective in almost every form of Republican language that imagination could describe. Senator Lodge in his report to the Senate in 1917 referred to the payment of twenty-five million dollars under the treaty as "a blackmail demand" and as "a degradation to which the United States should never submit."

And yet last month under the leadership of Senator Lodge, a Republican Senate consented to the treaty and even voted down an amendment, which would have declared that it

was not the intent of the treaty to admit any wrong on our part in 1903.

Could there be a clearer case of a purely political attitude toward a foreign policy? An important treaty is denounced under the pretext of opposition to its provisions but really because of its authorship and then, when the sponsor of the treaty goes out of office, the Republican administration urges and accepts in toto that treaty and that policy of the hated statesman, Woodrow Wilson.

Moreover, that is not the only Democratic policy taken over bodily by the present administration. Look at the case of the island of Yap. The former administration consistently sought to have that island made available for the benefit of the cable communications of the Pacific. I recall that President Wilson mentioned it in Paris as early as January, 1919, and he continued his efforts throughout his term of office.

It must be remembered that any present rights in the island of Yap must be based on the Treaty of Versailles for it was that treaty that ended the sovereignty of Germany over the island.

Well, the previous administration made various representations and wrote various notes on the question to the League of Nations and to the Principal Allied Powers; this administration has merely continued the series; naturally we have no objection to this any more than we have any objections to the adoption by this administration of the policy of the former administration in regard to oil rights in Mesopotamia.

Of course we welcome this most perfect and conclusive vindication of Democratic policy; actions speak louder than words, and even two months' history has sufficed to disprove many of the slanders of two years.

Our objection is to the attitude of the administration even when it is adopting and pursuing the sound Democratic policy previously laid down; that difference in inspiration and motive which I have mentioned is consistently apparent.

In a note of the previous administration of November 20th last, it was said:

“the Government of the United States has consistently urged that it is of the utmost importance to the future peace of the world that alien territory, transferred as a result of the war with the Central Powers, should be held and administered in such a way as to assure equal treatment to the commerce and to the citizens of all nations.”

A few days ago President Harding said to the fleet these words:

“we do want that which is righteously our own, and, by the eternal, we mean to have that.”

Could there be a greater contrast, a greater difference in basic principle?

There is no question anywhere of any rights of the United States being denied or withheld by any one; but suppose there was; let us imagine that there existed some doubt or difference between our country and another as to some claim of ours; do we have to say swaggeringly that by the eternal, thus and so must happen? What would we think of such an utterance of Mr. Lloyd-George or by some Japanese statesman, for example?

Indeed, does not such language rather call to mind some of the outgivings of a former European ruler, now happily removed from power?

During the campaign, Senator Harding talked much

about an international tribunal for the determination of our international rights and the international rights of others—does President Harding wish us to suppose that those were weasel words?

Think of it for a moment; we are the richest and doubtless the most powerful nation on the globe; leaving aside any question of morals or righteousness, and taking purely a materialistic point of view, our greatest ultimate interest is the promotion of justice internationally and the preservation of peace. Is not a policy based on justice for all, on equality of opportunity, the policy which is most to our profit, the policy which will bring us the most benefit, rather than any blatant demand for advantages for ourselves?

Wholly without regard to any thought of idealism and simply from the calculation of self-interest, should we not remember that the influence of the United States never reached so great a height, so supreme a position as it did after the armistice under the unselfish Democratic policy of the Wilson administration?

Then we were listened to simply because we spoke; and surely no one will challenge the assertion that such is not the case now.

I could go on and show how the position of the former administration has been vindicated in other matters of foreign policy such as the matter of reparations for instance; after these two years of ignorant or malicious denunciation, the views of President Wilson and his advisers at the Conference of Paris have been demonstrated to be correct and the only progress that is being made by the present administration or by any one else in the matter is along their lines.

But I need not detail them all; let it suffice us that truth is on the march adown the road of time.

Now let us consider the political attitude of the Republican party and of the present administration toward the Treaty of Versailles. I am not speaking, of course, of individual exceptions; I am speaking of the official administration and party attitude.

In thinking of this question, we shall be led astray if we leave out of sight for a moment the fundamental reason for the Republican attitude, and that fundamental reason is this: the Democratic party was in power during the eight most important years of the world's history and the Republicans are never going to forgive history for that slight.

After all the tumult and the shouting about the general provisions of the treaty with Germany—I do not now refer to the Covenant of the League of Nations, I shall come to that in a moment—it now appears that those general provisions were wise and proper and are to be adopted by the present administration. President Harding has intimated as much and even the shameful resolution of Senator Knox, after modification at the White House, provides that “the United States of America reserves for itself and its nationals all of the rights, powers, claims, privileges, indemnities, reparations or advantages which were stipulated” under the Treaty of Versailles. Of course, I suppose that there are still to be shed some more crocodile tears about the Japanese rights in Shantung by the successors in office of their Republican predecessors who congratulated Germany twenty years ago when Germany stole those rights from China.

None the less, the Treaty, it seems, is to be ratified; that document which it is hardly an exaggeration to say is the charter of the present political system of Europe, came into being under the influence of the Democratic policy of

the previous administration, and the party now in power finds itself both unable to change it, if it would, and also unwilling to change it if it were able.

There remains only the matter of the League of Nations. Here the purpose of the administration is apparent, although the exact method by which it will attempt to carry out that purpose is not yet disclosed. Contrary to the wishes, the hopes and even the prayers of the Republican party, the report of the death of the League of Nations, so many times announced, proves to have been greatly exaggerated. Not only is the League of Nations alive and doing well, but the present administration is under the painful necessity of dealing with the League in the matter of Yap and otherwise; so we no longer hear of the demise of the League, that campaign declaration which was amusingly coupled with the statement that the corpse remained an overawing super-government.

We are now told that the League is rejected but in the same breath that the administration will make every effort for an Association of Nations which the United States should join.

Of course the real Republican trouble with the League of Nations is that it is the child of a Democratic brain. I am glad to observe, however, that it is intended to change its name back to Association of Nations, for that was Woodrow Wilson's original idea, as any one can see who takes the trouble to read the last of the Fourteen Points; not until Paris was Mr. Wilson persuaded to adopt the word League, which is, indeed, not so near an equivalent of the French title Société as is the word Association.

And with the change of name must doubtless come some changes of detail; we may expect to see very grave discussions as to the best way of taking out of the Covenant things

which it does not contain and of excluding from international concern various matters which no one but a Republican Senator could conjure up as bogies.

The Republicans are really envious; they want the child; and with a different name and with a little different clothing, they hope that the author of its being will be forgotten, and that they will have the credit of paternity or at least credit for some paternal care.

No one will begrudge them that real solace to a sterile brain; after all, if one cannot have an idea of one's own, the next best thing is to adopt a good idea of some one else; the Republican party has always cared more for power than for ideas, and the combination of Republican power and Democratic ideas is doubtless very attractive to the administration, for it includes all the advantages of thinking without involving the disagreeable necessity of mental effort.

When we turn from foreign affairs to domestic matters, we naturally find for Republican policy the same basic attitude of mind with its similar resulting incidents.

To the eternal credit of the Democratic administration, the war was fought so far as the United States was concerned, without a single thought of politics or of anything connected with party. For the general in command of our forces was chosen a distinguished officer all of whose associations were Republican; not a single request or recommendation made by General Pershing during the fighting was ever refused or disapproved by the Commander-in-Chief; no general ever had a freer hand; none was ever more trusted, unless it be Foch, to whom President Wilson left it to write the terms of the German Armistice.

A few weeks before March 4th, President Wilson sent to the Senate a list of nominations of major-generals in the Army, a list based wholly on merit. The Senate refused

even to consider the names. Last month with one exception, the same list is submitted and confirmed; and the exception is that there was omitted the name of General Bundy, the author in France of the immortal phrase:

“Retreat? Hell, No.”

and for General Bundy's name was substituted that of an officer who had the support of Republican Senators from New England.

General Pershing appeared before the last Congress, which was Republican, and suggested an army program of one hundred and seventy-five thousand men; but General Pershing's views were approved by President Wilson so Congress would have none of them and the Army bill was vetoed. Now we see the present Secretary of War recommending to Congress exactly that same army program.

Could anything be more childish, more stupidly partisan? I could give you instance after instance of the same sort, such as the three gentlemen in the Treasury Department nominated to be Assistant Secretaries of the Treasury, two at least of them I believe, being Republicans, whom the Senate refused to confirm until after March 4th had passed.

However, there are more important domestic questions than these before the country.

Last Fall the voters were told after some years of prosperity such as the country had never before seen, that a Republican administration was necessary as an assurance of good business. I suppose the Republicans, or some of them at least, really believed it, for the belief in a sort of divine right of republicanism dies just about as hard in the reactionary circles of Wall Street as the belief in the divine right of Kings did in the reactionary circles of royalty.

In times past a vested assumption of prosperity was arro-

gated by the Republicans, perhaps because of their natural alliance with vested interests generally; but this time something went wrong with the prediction; for now, according to the labor authorities, there are about five million men out of work in this country.

The Administration proposes to correct this situation by various methods.

In the first place, it is proposing to reduce the taxation on all individual incomes in excess of one hundred thousand dollars a year. I suppose the idea is that the matter of the income tax is one of indifference to a man out of a job as he, having no income, is relieved of the trouble of making any income tax return at all.

In the next place, the Administration is seeking to increase our foreign trade. True, like the original Bourbons, having learned nothing from the past, the Republicans imagine that a tariff which it is hoped will prevent other countries from trading with us, will not be any obstacle to our trading with them. So they will first build a tariff wall and then leave the matter of foreign trade to Mr. Hoover.

Now I have nothing against Mr. Hoover personally, quite the contrary. Mr. Hoover is one of the two really able men in the Cabinet; indeed, it would not be extravagant, though perhaps impolite, to say that he is one of the two really able men in the Administration. The only thing against Mr. Hoover is that he has fallen into bad company. His associates are not such as I would choose for him; and I fear that their influence is being felt, for I noticed the other day that Mr. Hoover's first step toward promoting our foreign trade is to be the establishment of twelve new bureaus in the Department of Commerce at an annual expense of say seven hundred thousand dollars. The establishment of new bureaus is so typically an instance of Republican domestic

policy that it would seem harsh to charge this to Mr. Hoover personally. I put it down rather to the influences that surround him; for after all, Mr. Hoover has been a Republican for only about a year back.

I would be the last to contend that the Administration policy is fully stated or even developed. To the extent that it is not wholly drawn from Democratic sources, for such a question, for example, as the best method of turning out all the Democratic postmasters, who have passed civil service examinations, in order to make room for Republicans, thought is necessary, and the present Administration naturally requires time for thought.

These are my comments and I promised you when I commenced that I would not pass any judgment; but after all, is it so that two months is too short a time to form a fairly sound opinion of the new Administration?

Now I do not want to talk too long and I shall try to avoid that danger; but I want to say a little about the duty of the Democratic party during these four years of opposition—and by four years I mean only four years.

First of all, we must maintain that attitude of constructive statesmanship which we displayed during eight years of office; for during that period the Democratic party has a record of achievement which is unequalled in history. Every one who took any part in it ought to be proud of having lived at such a time.

I am not going to review that record; I shall mention the Federal Reserve Act alone; there is enough achievement in that without mentioning anything else. That law was written and passed as a Democratic policy and it was enacted in the face of the Republican opposition and against the protest of the Wall Street bankers generally.

Every one knows that without that statute we could not

have gone through this period of deflation without a violent panic and with it the country passed through the necessary financial changes without serious difficulty.

Neither am I going to claim as part of that party record the conduct of the war; the Democratic party is entitled to credit for the fact that it conducted the war without regard to party, but that is all; let us look back at the war wholly from the plane of patriotism and not at all of party, whatever may be the attitude of any one else.

We have seen the war made use of as a campaign argument of the basest type; some have even not hesitated to assail our army and our navy for the sake of votes; sums of money that were spent to save American lives have been criticized by small or vicious minds as extravagant; but surely the correct attitude of the Democratic party should not be changed by reason of that unworthy attitude of others.

Indeed, it seems to me that that spirit should be the keynote of the policy of the Democratic party while out of power; in other words, that we should treat every question that arises from a constructive and not from a political standpoint, even when we are convinced that the reasons for the Administration attitude are wholly political.

Let me be a little specific in this matter; the Administration is undoubtedly going to propose a scheme of tax reduction or revision; now my own view is that the burdens of taxation should be lessened where they now weigh on those of small or moderate means; if I am right as to that, the Democratic duty would certainly be to support any proposal along these lines, no matter what its source was. Perhaps it is a little fanciful to suppose that any such proposal might come from the present Administration, but I take an extreme case as an illustration.

Even more strongly do I feel that such should be our attitude in foreign affairs. The fact that the official Republican attitude toward the gravest international situation which the world ever saw has been one to which every American will look back with shame a few years from now, is the strongest of reasons why the Democratic party should not descend even part way to such a level.

It is especially appropriate that I should press this view on such an audience as this; for the goal of any decent foreign policy of any people should be the preservation of world peace; the Democratic party has made that ideal a part of the fabric of its being; and if that ideal does not win the approval and support of you women of this country, of the women of the world, we must, indeed, despair.

Working with the whole hearted cooperation and support of many eminent Republicans, Woodrow Wilson and his associates prepared and offered to the world the noblest plan for the preservation of world peace that the world has ever seen; and that plan was examined and debated by its political critics from a point of view as elevated as that from which they would have approached a River and Harbor bill.

Let it never be said of the Democratic party that its devotion to the cause of peace and justice the world over is sullied by any envy, by any personal hatred, by any lust for office or by any greed of power; let us strive for our goal by every road; let us always raise the standard to which the wise and the honest may repair; and we shall then have done our duty.

And having done our duty, having kept the faith, we can know that the future is ours. If we keep out of view any thought of party advantage for that future and keep simply in mind our devotion to our ideals and our duty to our

country, we shall have behind us those forces which make success inevitable.

We know that the present majority is a thing of shreds and patches, a blending of discordant and even hostile elements. Among those groups are many who are naturally of our persuasion and who will inevitably join us if we remain steadfast to that ideal which is as much theirs as ours.

Not with boasting, not with swaggering, not with braggadocio can the flag of our country be lifted to the heights of world glory where it belongs. A devotion to liberty, a passion for justice and a love for peace will not take away one jot or tittle of our power, but will make our strength beautiful as the morning.

For we are powerful—we can never forget it—we do not want to forget it, but let us remember, too, the words of the poet:

“O, it is excellent
To have a giant’s strength,
But it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.”

[6323]